
San Diego County Collaborative Team Develops a Plan for Managing Sex Offenders

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The San Diego County Probation Department successfully applied for a grant from the Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. This grant, administered by the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM), gave jurisdictions the opportunity to form community collaboratives that would focus on local issues related to sex offender management and identify new directions for future community responses. Because the grant was awarded to the Probation Department, the Project Director was that department's representative. The project staff included a group facilitator who led the collaborative process and wrote our final report. We were fortunate to find a facilitator familiar with the criminal justice system as well as with the treatment issues specific to our offender population.

During the grant application process we obtained memoranda of understanding (MOUs) from all agencies involved in the process. Based on those MOUs, each agency provided an individual committed to the 18-month process. When the collaborative team began meeting, we discussed several logistical concerns. We decided that the Hall of Justice was a convenient meeting place, and the District Attorney's office graciously volunteered a conference room throughout the process. The Probation Department provided administrative support for minutes and mailing/distribution of materials. All other expenses, with the exception of staff time, were funded by the grant.

Roles and Communication Process

Each partner in our process agreed to chair or co-chair one of the committees that were formed to complete our work. These committees included the following:

Committee:

Community Supervision
Court Protocol
Victim Advocacy
Assessment and Treatment
Notification and Registration
Data Collection

Chaired by:

Probation and Parole
Court, D.A., and Public Defender
Center for Community Solutions
Relationship Training Institute
County Sheriff and Police
San Diego Association of Governments

Within each of these focus areas, committee members took on the following tasks as the basis for writing the final implementation plan for future program development:

- ◆ Studied current practices in San Diego County’s management of adult sex offenders and sexually abusive youth;
- ◆ Researched national “promising practices” in the management of these offender populations;
- ◆ Collected data on a portion of our offender population; and
- ◆ Conducted a gap analysis to determine what San Diego County could do to improve the management of these populations.

The team also brought in community members who had an interest in our work. We hosted three large community meetings to disseminate information and obtain community input and support. Community members were encouraged to join committees so they could contribute their knowledge, expertise, and individual points of view.

The team met once a month for the entire grant period. The group also made two trips to conferences in Philadelphia, where CSOM provided technical assistance related to sex offender populations and the grant process in general. The project manager and researcher also attended a training session in Washington, D.C., to discuss specifics related to the data collection element of this grant. Most committees met on a monthly basis, although some found it necessary to meet more frequently.

CSOM provided technical assistance throughout this process. Both a project advisor and a research advisor were assigned to our jurisdiction, and each visited our county to help facilitate our process as well as communicating by phone and e-mail.

Challenges to the Project

We had several obstacles during this process; however, none prevented us from completing our tasks. One challenge was how to communicate effectively with the treatment community. Some clinicians were not particularly

Profile: Collaborative Team, Comprehensive Approaches to Sex Offender Management, San Diego, California

Partner agencies:

San Diego County Probation Department, Office of the Public Defender, and District Attorney’s Office
 San Diego Superior Court
 California Dept. of Corrections, Parole and Community Services Division
 Relationship Training Institute
 Center for Community Solutions
 San Diego Sheriff’s Department
 San Diego Police Department
 San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)

Purpose:

This grant-funded team was tasked with studying local and national management of sex offender populations and preparing a plan for implementing new programs.

Mission:

To enhance the safety of our community we will:

- ◆ Develop an ongoing collaborative regional team which includes victims;
- ◆ Establish standardized protocols relevant to assessing, treating, and monitoring convicted sex offenders and sexually abusive youth residing in our community; and
- ◆ Educate the community and the criminal justice system regarding effective management of sex offenders and sexually abusive youth.

Launched: October 1999; completed work May 2001.

interested in joining our process, and others did not want to change their methods for assessing and treating sex offenders. To overcome this challenge, we invited treatment providers to a special meeting in which we addressed their concerns as well as ours. We also included a treatment provider on a trip to another state to observe a model we were considering for implementation in San Diego. These steps didn't completely eliminate differences in opinions and orientations, but they did help us understand each other and have allowed us to continue working together to establish standards for the assessment and treatment of offenders.

Another challenge has been the difference in the level of participation of various team members. Some of us were quite committed to the process and the implementation of appropriate change, while others were less committed in terms of time, depth of knowledge, and flexibility. We overcame this obstacle by understanding that each person would contribute what they could, and that the group could go forward in spite of individual limitations. In addition, we acknowledged and respected the fact that our team was comprised of representatives from agencies with varying perspectives and mandates, and that certain practices might therefore not be negotiable for some team members.

What We Learned

During this process we have learned a lot from each other. We've learned how our system operates, and we all have a better understanding of each agency's and each individual's role within that system. We learned a lot about the strengths within our county and an equal amount about the limitations we must overcome. We learned about political realities, local priorities, and communication gaps. We learned from other jurisdictions that shared their experiences, both positive and negative. We learned that participants from all perspectives could have a voice and contribute to a safer community. We learned that all parts of a system can work together—if they want to.

One of the greatest things we learned was that we could be productive and have a good time doing it. We enjoyed sharing the experience of the education we received, and we were collectively proud of our final product. We all had a good sense of humor and relied on that quality to bring some levity to an otherwise serious and disturbing topic. We learned to appreciate each other on a personal level, and we enjoyed coming together to reconnect, as well as to do our work.

Our suggestions for others interested in developing partnerships include:

- ◆ Obtain front-end commitments from all the participants.
- ◆ Find individuals who are truly interested in the work you want to do.
- ◆ Allow for individual differences, and acknowledge that each person and agency will represent different perspectives.
- ◆ Trust the process. With commitments and time you will reach your goals. ■

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